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News Sourcing, Positioning and Thematic Focus: Examining Newspaper Portrayal of Herdsmen- Farmers Conflict in Nigeria

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This study examined how Nigerian newspapers reported the herdsmen and farmers' conflict in Nigeria. It analyzed the contents of six newspapers to explore the primary sources, the prominence accorded the conflict reports, and the themes focused on their reportage. Findings show that out of the 159 stories considered for the study, newspapers relied mostly on their correspondents and herdsmen representatives as primary news sources. Public condemnation/protests and government/public intervention were the dominant thematic focus. The north-south media axis phenomenon in Nigeria resonated in the coverage as the frame of 'herdsmen-against-farmers' is indicated more in the southern-based newspapers consistent with the prevailing public notion. The study suggests that the media in Nigeria relied mainly on third party sources with the consequence their reports on the issue could be subject to source credibility deficiency. In addition to addressing the general theme of reportage of the herdsmen conflict, this study explicitly addresses how the newspapers covered the conflict in Benue and Enugu states.

Keywords: Benue and Enugu states, representation, herdsmen and farmers, news sources, Nigerian newspaper

As concerned Nigerians continue to weigh in on the seriousness and consequences of sectarian conflicts in the country, much of scholarly discussions have tended to focus attention on the causes and effects of the herders-farmers conflict. The possible influence of news sources and attributions, as well as the key themes of media discussion, has not been adequately explored in the existing literature. 'Source' which means the source of information from which the reporter gathers material to write a story includes documentary sources such as written reports, social media, eyewitnesses, whistleblowers, local/federal officials, and other community officials is a possible factor in how news stories are framed or presented (Fisher, 2018). If a particular journalist gains access to an independent source, for instance, the likelihood exists for such journalists to feel compelled to follow the source's lead in framing the news (Boesman, Berbers, d'Haenens, & Van Gorp, 2015). Also, the reason that when a story first emerges, it is initially framed through the lenses/frames of past similar events, and in that case, structures could and would be maintained by presenting their stories to appear supportive.

It has been noted that some journalists in some parts of the world may, for some cultural, political, or economic reasons, find it difficult to practice what (Waisbord, 2013)

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referred to as 'autonomous' reporting (i.e., reporting with limited external influence). In western democratic societies, 'objectivity,' 'independence,' and 'scrutiny' remain dominant values in which case the adversarial relationship between source and journalists prevails. In non-western democracies like Nigeria where objectivity and independence are less dominant, journalists are expected to 'support' government policies and convey a positive image of political and business leadership – in this wise, journalist-source relationship dynamics tend to be less combative or adversarial. The multi-ethnic and multi-religious realities in Nigeria have a likelihood of impacting the journalist-source relationship in the pastoralists-farmers conflict, especially in the northern axis of the country dominated by Muslims. This factor was found to have readily manifested in the configuration of source attribution in this study.

The role of the press in modern societies includes upholding the tenets of social responsibility through professional standards of truth, accuracy, and fairness in reporting (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1963). In this wise, Owolabi (2017) urges that the media should report in a way to reflect and respect society's diversity and plurality while avoiding actions that could cause violence and anarchy. According to Jeong (2008), when the mass media report diversities, they focus, among other things, on the conflicts or contradictions that arise out of frustration of some groups caused by perceived or real exclusion from the mainstream of the economy and politics. Lewis (2007) also has observed that crises raise security challenges while the economic, social, and political implications grow in complexity.

Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, and Roberts (2013) observed that some research on the source-media relationship tends to address two critical frameworks for analysis. These include developing a structural approach in which access is a function of the source's position within the dominant hegemony, and through sociological inquiries which examine the source-journalist relationship. However, little research is available on how to source attribution is likely to influence a journalist's framing or presentation of their story, an area this paper addresses.

News sources are significant in the formation and structure of news stories. In fact, according to (Franklin & Carlson, 2011), news stories are unthinkable without contemporary sources. Similarly, Turk (1985) disagrees with news definition as what happens; instead defined it as what a news source says has happened. In his view, Gans (1979) sees news sources as actors whom journalists observe or interview, and this includes those who are quoted, those who only supply background information, or give story suggestions. Reich (2010) argues that sources are included in the stories because of their credibility and authority in the news, and according to Mencher (2011), they are seen as the lifeblood for journalists. The preceding underscores why the journalists-source relationship is seen as the basis of journalism. In journalistic routines of the newsgathering process, the journalists have to meet deadlines in the pre-decided time limitations (Broersma & Graham, 2012; O'Neill & O'Connor, 2008). That is why media practitioners build strong relationships with credible sources (Berkowitz, 2009; Shoemaker & Reese, 2013).

Literature Review

The herdsmen and farmers' conflict in Nigeria has been generating a considerable amount of academic interests. Some sociological factors have been alluded to as predisposing factors—including viewing the conflicts as politically— motivated, imputing ethno-religious factors, and underdevelopment (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005; Kempf, 2007; Lynch, 2008). The media, by their actions, change the impact and process by which conflict unfolds

(Galtung, 2002; Kempf 2003). For instance, Thompson (2004) supports the notion that media contribute to violence, citing the instability and fragmentation of Yugoslavia in recent history. Others blame the media for inciting the 1994 genocide in Rwanda (Metzl, 1997; Kalyango & Vultee, 2012). Opeyemi, Oyesomi, Tayo-Adigboluja, and Nkechi (2020) have also looked into the Nigerian press from the Fulani-herdsmen's activities and the fantasy themes. However, digital media have changed the attention of the public towards national unity. With the advent of user-generated content (UGC), media reflect group identities and intergroup prejudices characterizing Nigeria as a country with fragile unity (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2019).

According to (Ahmed, 2008; Odunlami, 2017; Omenugha, Uzuegbunam, & Omenugha, 2013), the media have been accused of sensationalizing crises, promoting prejudicial stereotypes about groups and individuals, and indeed instigating and sustaining violent conflicts in Nigeria.

According to Duan and Takahashi (2016), media representations and commentaries on the herdsmen and farmers' conflict could engender mixed impressions in people's minds (either positive or negative). As Skorup (2017 & 2018) and McQuail (2010) observed, regulations and controls of the media notwithstanding, distorted messages and emotion-laden content still exist in the media space – and most of these are mostly driven by the need to sell the newspaper content. Ekeanyanwu (2017) examined press coverage of political crises and conflicts in Nigeria and posited that the Nigerian press was more of an active participant in political crises and disputes rather than being an impartial judge.

Media presentations could engender mixed impressions in people's minds, either positive or negative, as in the herdsmen and farmers' conflict (Duan & Takahashi 2016). Skorup (2017) and McQuail (2010) observed that distortions in messages, as well as emotion-laden content, continue to show up in some media messages most times for profit motives. Odunlami (2017) also alleged that despite the volatility and the tragedies that ethnic violence has had and continues to evoke in the country, stories of the ethnic clashes do not enjoy sufficient prominence as a national crisis in the newspapers, suggesting that the media do not give adequate coverage to the crises. Again, in their study of television news perspective of conflict reporting, Akpoghiran and Otite (2012) found in their research that the audience does not consider NTA's news reportage on conflict to be of any significance to national unity.

Onwuneli and Olimma (2015) investigated the coverage of Nigerian newspapers on terrorism in the country, with particular reference to the 1st October 2010, bomb blast in Abuja, Nigeria, situating their work on the notion that reporting hardcore terrorist acts and terrorism was relatively new for the media in Nigeria. They believed that the attack, allegedly carried out by MEND (Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta), was perhaps the first pronounced domestic experience of their brand of terrorism often associated with widespread Muslim fundamentalism in the Middle East. The study findings indicated that the bomb blast was adequately covered; it received prominent positioning while the papers displayed considerable objectivity in their reportage. The stories also showed a balance between sensational and non-sensational news stories, which was contrary to expectations.

The Onwuneli and Olimma's study, however, did not align with some similar studies such as Iwuchukwu (2001), which found that the local press was 'sensational' and 'explosive' in their coverage of 1988 religious riots in Zaria, Kaduna State. It also contradicts Amenaghawon's (2015) work, which analyzed the framing of the bombing of Saint Theresa's Catholic Church, in the *Daily Trust* and *The Guardian* newspapers. The authors adopted a content analysis design and found that a split still exists in the mass media along the

north-south geopolitical divide. It, however, agrees with other studies that have found that media reports on terrorism and conflicts are heavily information-laden but shallow in deep conversations and analytical proposals for their resolution. This evidences the need for adopting and integrating Nigeria media into peace journalism or conflict-sensitive communication.

Even though there appears to be no shortage of literature on the causes and consequences of conflict in Nigeria as elsewhere; however, not much of the academic work is focused on the relevance of news sources in the entire structure just as the role of prominent positions in the reportage of the conflict is inadequately reflected; this study, therefore, finds relevance in identifying and highlighting the role these variables played in the coverage of herdsmen and farmers conflict in Nigeria.

Importance of Focusing on News Sources

The news media, through news sources, determine what information the media audience would have access to and how that information could impact people's beliefs, emotions, and behavior towards others. The source of information is an essential factor in news credibility, and this has particular relevance to the herdsmen and farmers' conflict in terms of how readers would view, understand and interpret the crisis, Kulaszewicz (2015). Nearness to the scene of the event proved to be a factor in news sourcing as local media, such as *The Voice of Makurdi* in Benue State, and *Orient Daily* of Awka in Anambra State – each covered the conflict stories in their specific areas. They provided considerable in-depth coverage of the events within their locality much more than the national news media did. This is so because they are expected to be more in touch with the victims and the actors who serve as news sources.

In terms of shaping content, some scholars (Miller, 1998; Miller & Dinan, 2000) argue that several privileged groups contribute to the production of media accounts. These groups include social and political institutions and other interest groups such as lobbyists and the public relations industry. In the case of the herdsmen-farmers conflict, the non-state actors also contribute to the production of news as the news sources. As they interact, they shape the issues under discussion. However, the outcome of such could sometimes restrict the information the audiences could gain access to in the process of active gatekeeping, filtering, removing specific issues from the public discussion, or even adding some in-between (Happer & Philo, 2013).

The analysis of media content –of what we are told and not told– is therefore of primary concern. But the relationship of media content to audiences, as Happer and Philo further contend, is not singular or one-way as newsmakers can both feed information into the media funnel and also anticipate audience response to how policy is shaped and presented. Khuhro et al. (2020), citing (Davis, 2009; Wolfsfeld & Sheaffer, 2006; Gandy, 1982), noted that politicians use official and unofficial information means to influence journalists through formal media-friendly events. The authors citing (Lewis, Williams, & Franklin, 2008) added that politicians share handouts, press releases, video news releases, and press briefings as well as special reports among journalists and media houses, making it convenient for journalists to develop stories. According to (Macias, 2012), the politicians give selective opinions about public issues compelling journalists to provide them with more attention.

Conflicts, Media Coverage and Victims

In reporting conflict, it has been suggested that timely and sensitive coverage of victims can be a helpful approach; this becomes necessary, especially where the public is desirous of knowing the outcomes of ongoing attacks or violent activities by non-state actors. As the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime (2020) observes, the media can humanize victims and their experiences by helping some of them tell their stories, especially those bothering on resilience and hope. To focus on the victim is a possible opportunity for affected persons or their family to express themselves about their loved ones who were either harmed or killed in the dispute – with the ultimate goal of humanizing them, and possibly reducing their pain.

Inaccurate information, sometimes due to wrong or uninformed sources about an ongoing crisis, can hurt its ability to shape public opinion and government policy in the wrong direction. Invariably, harmful, sensational, or inaccurate report when overtly exaggerated or incorrect tends to reinforce misconception and stereotypes. When the media emphasize sensational, high profile crime cases, at the expense of other victims of the same conflict, they do so by denying the lower victims their natural wish to be heard or read.

Other scholars such as Ekeanyanwu (2007); Crisis Goup (2017); Aliyu, Ikedinma, and Akinwande (2018); Abdu and Umar (2002); Owens-Ibie (2002); and Galadima (2002) have documented their discussions on the herdsmen-farmers conflict. Odunlami (2017) is of the view that stories of ethnic clashes do not enjoy sufficient prominence in the newspapers despite the tragedies they evoke in the country. According to him, more attention is paid to politicians, groups, and associations as the newspaper's primary sources of news, rather than the victims of the crises (Odunlami, 2017).

Hamid and Baba (2014) find that coverage and reportage of insurgency require the media to provide adequate coverage by giving appropriate accounts, including a volume of reports of issues. According to them, however, research findings on ethno-religious conflicts in post-colonial Nigeria show that they have received adequate media attention. Citing Bola (2010), the authors affirmed that conflicts in Nigeria have consistently received maximum media coverage. The study, however, was silent on the sources of information used in the reports or the dominant themes. Moreover, the rationale for engaging in analyzing sources of news in a crisis stems from the realization that: first, there was an increase in public awareness of sources and sourcing practice following the Gilligan/Kelly affair (Hutton, 2012). The BBC journalist who was at the center of the scandal – Andrew Gilligan – had obtained information from an 'anonymous source,' which was later revealed to be Dr. David Kelly, a former UN weapons inspector, and government advisor. This information was used to accuse the UK government of exaggerating or even falsifying the rationale for invading Iraq.

In his paper, *"News framing in the United States of the violence in Jos, Nigeria,"* Brewer and Gross (2012) found among other things, that one of the most dominant themes in explaining violence in Jos is the theme of "Muslim-Christian strife," tracing the issue to 2003 when The New York Times reported that Christians in Nigeria were uneasy about the adoption of Islamic law (Sharia) in eight northern states. Bruner also found that sometimes the clashes between gangs were attributed to an economic or political grievance, citing The New York Times' report on December 2, 2008, that perceived 'rigged local elections may have triggered the violence.' Bruner observed that the two newspapers he studied used existing fault lines to frame their report using and pushing the lines of religion, ethnicity, and economy.

This research is considered valuable in the sense that it increases the scope of existing studies already conducted on this and similar subject matters in Nigeria, such as media biases, source credibility, media framing, and the north-south media axis. It also highlights the research gap in the journalist-source relationship as well as a comparative study of north-south based newspapers; and national-regional tabloids in the coverage of sectarian conflicts. Collectively, the study would help to understand the news content of national and regional media during internal conflicts with particular reference to the northern pastoralists against indigenous farmers.

The quality of news sourcing is a predictor of the credibility of the news content, especially in a sectarian situation. The sources should be reliable, objective, fair, and free from biases. The study disclosed the various sources relied upon by journalists who directly or indirectly covered the herdsmen and farmers' conflict, which was found to be heavily dependent on third parties whose views are likely to be biased. The study would help future researchers to investigate what possible sources could be available to reporters in the process of covering conflicts within a state.

Some constraints, such as logistics and finance, were encountered during this study. At the time of conducting the research, the herdsmen-farmers conflict was raging in the north-central area of Benue state hence making it difficult to physically conduct a content analysis study of the state-based newspaper in the country. The alternative effort to use a proxy-research assistant was used instead with huge funding implications.

Limited studies exist on news sources in the herdsmen-farmers coverage in Nigerian press; hence this study investigated the sources relied upon by newspapers, their pattern of coverage and prominence, and the significant themes focused by the newspapers in reporting the conflict. These are possible predictors of public understanding and perception of the issues at stake. Shoemaker (1996) and McQuail (1994) hold that many factors tend to condition the acceptance of sources as bona fide by investigative journalists, stressing that journalists need to develop and cultivate various sources, primarily if they regularly cover a specific topic, known as a "beat."

The objective of this study is, therefore, to investigate the sources and patterns of news reports by journalists in the coverage of herdsmen-farmers' conflict in the north-central and southeastern states in Nigeria. The following research questions explore the relationship of media coverage and herdsmen-farmers' conflict.

- RQ1.** What was news sources relied upon by the six newspapers (four national and two regional) in reporting on herdsmen and farmers' conflicts?
- RQ2.** What pattern of coverage and prominence did the six newspapers give to the conflict?
- RQ3.** What major themes/frames were focused/built by the six newspapers in reporting the conflict?

Methodology

Content analysis was adopted for this study. Relevant data/old newspaper copies were obtained from the libraries of the newspapers. The population of the study constitutes the period from May 29th, 2015 to May 28, 2017. This period is the first two years when the All Progressives Congress (APC) took over leadership of the country and promised to resolve the conflict. This period is considered by many in the country to be the saturation point of the crisis – sufficient enough to be assessed vis-à-vis media coverage of the conflict.

Justification/Clarifications

The origin and growth of the Nigerian press evolved along the lines from missionary days, through anti-colonialism, anti-military, regional or tribal press and thus created an impression for the emergence of what is commonly referred to as Lagos-Ibadan and Abuja-Kaduna (i.e., south-north) axis – a template that virtually defines media practice along those seemingly innocuous but potent lines - providing a lens through which press activities in the country are viewed (Amenaghawon, 2015). Similarly, the Nigerian society is highly polarized along ethnic, religious, and geographical lines, which analyzes issues sometimes beclouded by emotions (Canci & Odukoya, 2016; Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). Consequently, we chose four national and two regional newspapers (along with north-south spread), to test if and how the north-south geographical balance is reflected in the reportage; secondly to check the notion that proximity to news source could affect news coverage as the two regional newspapers were located in Benue state, north-central Nigeria and Enugu state, southeast Nigeria.

The constructed week technique (Hester & Dougall, 2007) was used to select two alternate working days out of the five days in a week (Monday to Friday), in each month, between May 2015 and May 2017. This ensured fair representation of the population. A total of 156 newspaper issues were selected for coding. A coding sheet was designed and used to extract information related to the subject of study following previous studies (Beckers & Aelst, 2019; Kleemans et al., 2015; Dobbelaer & Raeymaeckers, 2018).

The news source variables under consideration were herdsmen representatives/Myetti Allah, farmers, politicians, security agents, newspaper reporters/correspondents, News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), newspaper in-house source, and others. The collected data were analyzed through the use of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), while for the reliability of the instrument, 157 stories were coded; the analyzed data showed 0.79 percent agreement among coders hence the intra-coder reliability for the frame type was 0.79. The various variables that were examined revealed strengths of agreement between 0.60 and 1.00 – indicating an almost perfect agreement among the coders.

Theoretical Framework

Agenda Setting Theory and Framing Theory

The Agenda-setting theory, McCombs and Shaw (1972), and Framing theory (Bateson (1972) provided the framework for this study. The agenda-setting theory explores the mass media relationship with the public and their effort to create and transfer salient issues into the public sphere enabling discussion, deliberation, or debate on them. McCombs and Shaw (1972) argued that the media makes specific political, economic, and social issues salient in society by how frequently and prominently those news items are covered. In essence, hence it is believed that the media shapes the public's opinion about specific issues.

Framing theory has been described as a term to represent the communication aspect, which leads to the people's preference by consenting one meaning to another, thus helping to stimulate the decision-making process by highlighting particular elements by eliminating the others. According to Druckman (2001), framing can manifest in thought or person-to-person communication and could consist of the mental representations, interpretations, and simplification of reality. It can be used to regulate the audience's perception and also the acceptance of a particular meaning. As media plays an essential

role in people's perceptions of the conflict, any framing that is discerned can create different types of impact upon the people. Following Arif and Hayat (2014), framing theory, as an essential concern of this study, is presented in a manner of a specific image, article, or storyline. The media's power to frame virtually any social-political or culturally relevant matter has been well documented. The theory explains further that the distinctive appeals of framing the news reports, TV dramas, and films have several different effects on the readership/viewership of social problems. To effectively communicate the issues, it is believed that social matters covered by the unique frames, as well as their impacts, should be adequately understood.

Discussion

In response to the research question on the news sources relied upon by the six newspapers (four national and two regional) in reporting on herdsmen-farmers' conflicts, finding from the study showed that the majority of news items had their origin from newspaper reporters or correspondents (42.8 %) or herdsmen and their associates (31.4%), or government officials (including the police 11 %) and a few sundry commentators while farmers were recorded as a source in 1.9% times. The source is used here in the sense of being those either in possession of the information, or those offering the information as observers to the conflicts or those acting on behalf of the conflicting parties. The prevalence of herdsmen commenting on the issues is a reflection of the group's vocal and outspoken nature, which manifests in their tendency to address the media almost every time following outbreaks of conflicts.

The inference from the situation is that the sources of news in a conflict situation such as in the herdsmen/farmers clashes can be quite unpredictable since the activities that generate the news are not pre-determined both in time and place. This means that since the attacks or reprisals are not prearranged, journalists are usually not the first to learn of or witness the development. In comparison, the situation not like the regular news beats where journalists are sometimes primed for an event, or they are invited to a press briefing/conference to announce an upcoming event. In this study, offensive and reprisal attacks that dominated this report occurred at unplanned times or occasions when journalists are very unlikely to be present to take direct sound bites from participants –the non-state actors– hence their resort to third parties for information.

It is learned from the study that sources of information to journalists were varied and unlimited – mostly the police, the local community people, Miyetti Allah representatives. This is an indication that the victims and participants of the conflict were hardly contacted or quoted. Most of the reports can be said to be based on the third-party account, which could reasonably affect their authenticity. Perhaps, only a fraction of what transpired in the herders and farmers' conflict got published, and the report may not be accurate, but had a high possibility of distortions. Accordingly, the research question on what news sources were relied upon by the six newspapers (four national and two regional) in reporting on herdsmen and farmers' conflicts, the answer is duly provided.

About the level of prominence, the newspapers gave to the conflict, findings showed that 17.6% of stories was in front page position, 2.5% on page 2, 6.9% back page, 6.3% centre-spread while 66.7% was other type of pages. Invariably, most of the stories were found inside the pages of the newspapers. Also, 2.5% (4) stories were found on page 2 of the newspapers, which this researcher considers to be prominent. The 6.3% (10) items found in center-spread, are also regarded as prominent by its location in the newspapers. By this calculation, altogether, the papers allocated 33.3 percent prominence out of the

total stories on herdsmen and farmers' conflicts within the period of study. If we add the stories that appeared on such unique pages as editorial page (5.4%) and leading pages (26.2%), it can be inferred that the stories received prominent positioning.

Positional placement of news items by most of the newspapers can be interpreted to be an indication that Nigerian newspapers viewed the issues of herdsmen and farmers' conflict as very serious and newsworthy. According to Oyero (2019, p. 112), the level of prominence, such as page placement given to a report, determines to an extent how the newspapers have set the agenda for the issue." Fedyk (2018), in a study of the effect of news positioning on financial markets, found that "front-page news is accompanied by substantially high trading volumes and absolute price changes for the tagged securities immediately after publication." The level of prominence, according to a report in terms of page placement, reflects implications on the extent to which the relevant newspapers have set a list for the issue within the period under study.

A further breakdown of the page placements indicates that more than a quarter of stories on the front page (primary) were positive, with nearly half being negative and 19 percent neutral. On the back page (major), 40 percent were positive, 20 percent negative, and 40 percent neutral while on the editorial page, 50 percent were positive, 25 percent negative, and 25 percent neutral. The volume of reports that appeared on the front page (minor), page lead, and editorial pages were equally significant with front page (minor) being (17 percent) and page lead stories at 43 percent.

The critical implication of prominent placement and highlighting of the herdsmen and farmers' conflict stories in the newspapers is that it portrays the importance which the newspapers place on the issues under discussion and can give a hint to the frame being projected. The question as to whether the conflict received adequate placement in the pages of newspapers is answered in the affirmative, indicating that Nigerians had a good chance of reading and understanding what was going on. Framing theory maintains that frames emphasize specific aspects of reality. Through the placement of stories in particular strategic positions, certain aspects of the conflict are highlighted and underlined, enabling people to interpret and comprehend the issues from the frame that is projected. There is, therefore, a close agreement between this finding and the sociology of news theory, which guides this study. Again, the second research question on what pattern of coverage and prominence the six newspapers gave to the conflict has been adequately responded to by the results.

In answering **RQ3**, what major themes/frames were focused/built by the six newspapers in reporting the conflict, the finding showed that some specific issues were found to be in focus by the newspapers, and they defined the specific nature of the reportage. These include:

- (i) Offensive Attack – This has to do with reports highlighting the first offensive action, sometimes unprovoked, initiated by either of the parties. These types of stories, by the way, they are written, highlight how and who launched the attack and possibly when as well as point the way to a possible understanding of whom the aggressors could be. Out of the total reports, 24 were on the offensive.
- (ii) Reprisal Attack – This also formed part of the specific nature in which the reports were presented, and they accounted for five mentions in the same way that arrest accounted for five. As the name suggests, the reprisal attack indicates that the newspapers wrote the stories following a response to an earlier attack.
- (iii) Public Condemnation – By far, the specific issue in the conflict report that received the highest coverage was public condemnation (39), which was an indication of

citizens' reaction and rage against the killings. It could be argued that the newspapers gave a reasonable amount of space to citizens to air their views about the controversy, much of which manifested in a rage and condemnation of the conflict. It goes without saying that in conflict situations, intervention efforts such as by individuals and groups are likely to assist in finding a solution, and the media provide ample opportunity for people to air their views. In this regard, our analysis is important to point out that within the period of the study, citizens expressed their opinions and rage against the crisis through the media.

- (iv) Conciliatory Efforts – From the outlook of newspaper reportage in this variable, many of the national newspapers appear to have paid little attention to conciliatory news, which, in a way, is inclined to peace. One possible explanation may be that since conciliatory news tends towards peace, it could be inferred that the newspapers are more interested in crisis-prone news than peace-oriented news. In this period of global clamor for peace journalism or conflict-sensitive communication, this position among these Nigerian newspapers is not encouraging as it tends to support the traditional notion that the media are more inclined towards the adverse events. This situation is evident from the data showing that *The Voice* had 62.5% while the other four shared the remaining 37.5%.
- (v) Investigation Report—The lowest entry of 2.5% came from investigative report, an indication that much of the reports were on the surface. However, it is to be expected that newspapers by their nature ought to go beyond the traditional five Ws and one H to explore the 'Why' of issues. Apparently, from the findings, this was not the case.

Overall, conciliatory news was reported on 16 occasions, which implies media efforts to bring the parties to a negotiating table. Incidentally, investigative stories came out very lean with only four mentions, indicating that not much was done in the area of getting the 'news behind the news' or putting some background to the stories through more in-depth and broader analytical perspectives. This is indeed a bane of present-day journalism. But this may be a result of insecurity that surrounds journalism practice in many African countries.

Conclusion

The focus of this study was to analyze and highlight the implications of the various news sources in herdsmen-farmers reporting in the Nigerian newspapers during a two-year period (when the conflict reached a breaking point). In response to **RQ1**, it is learned that sources of information to journalists were varied and unlimited – mostly the police, the local community people, Miyetti Allah representatives. On the other hand, other sources, like the farmers or victims of the conflict, were not highlighted. This is an indication that the victims and participants of the conflict were hardly contacted or quoted in the reporting. This finding, like previous studies (Kleemans et al., 2015; Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou, Jönsson & Örnebring, 2011, 2014; Ahva, 2012) marginalized sources such as farmers sources are less represented in the papers. The current study suggests that to know more about the representation of diverse sources in the Pakistani press, research should be conducted on both soft and hard issues both to see the image of different sources in the Pakistani press.

For **RQ2**, evidence from the study shows that newspapers gave ample prominence to the conflict by the way they positioned and allocated space both in their front pages,

back pages and inside pages with the implication for a guaranteed high attention score for the stories. Furthermore, the newspapers focused on relevant themes such as an offensive attack, reprisal attack, public protests as well as government intervention efforts, among others, which the public ought to know about. There was little or no focus on 'peace' as a plan for conflict resolution, or alternative dispute resolution strategies as a significant focus area for stakeholders. There was, however, heavy reliance on third parties for their sources of information on the conflict, and those also were the sources that were quoted. This could be seen as challenges in the reporting process and example of communication barriers with the possibility of distorting the report on the conflict.

Each of the newspapers had their focus differently; some focused attack, others on arrest while others emphasized conciliatory themes. Overall, the newspapers' focus on investigation stories was very low suggesting that they probably were not investing enough energy and resources into digging into causes and other implications of the conflict, hence the limited report on it. Lack of investigative effort on the part of Nigerian media especially in reporting these conflicts could be a factor in the failure to arrest the situation as intelligence information is very crucial to the resolution of conflicts of this nature. This dwindling rate of investigative journalism in the country and which has been amplified in this report should be a source of concern to stakeholders.

The study suggests that Nigerian newspapers should endeavor to devise more reliable and dependable information sourcing from the main participants in conflict – including the victims. Dependence on third parties or one-sided attribution is likely to convey a biased view of the reports. A situation in which most of the attributions or sources were traced to 'third parties– the police, or the herdsmen representatives' leaves much to be desired and should be addressed. Moreover, there should be a deliberate effort on the part of journalists to raise the agenda on peaceful resolution of the conflict, by deliberately highlighting it as a theme to focus and discuss, in addition to raising the issue of alternative dispute resolution to the front burners.

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